THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by: Conrad Aiken – Padraic Colum – Grace Hazard Conkling – Robert Frost – Frank Ernest Hill Hazel Hall – Alfred Kreymborg – David Morton Amy Murray – Louise Townsend Nicholl – George O'Neil – Pitts Sanborn – Wallace Stevens – Genevieve Taggard – – Winifred Welles – – Robert L. Wolf

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The Measure

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The Wild Ass

THE Wild Ass lounges, legs struck out
In vagrom unconcern:
The tombs of Achaemenian kings
Are for those hooves to spurn.

And all of rugged Tartary
Lies with him on the ground;
The Tartary that knows no awe,
That has nor ban nor bound.

The wild horse from the herd is plucked
To bear a saddle's weight;
The boar is one keeps covert, and
The wolf runs with a mate.

But he's the solitary of space,
Curbless and unbeguiled;
The only being that bears a heart
Not recreant to the wild!

Padraic Colum

Tristan of Morbihan

FROM LOW BRITTANY

"SON, is it so ye would drink and jest
Ere ever the wee hours ran?"
"Ay, Mother, a man so jesteth best,"
Quoth Tristan of Morbihan.

"And ye would brawl night long in the house,
Son Tristan, my bonnie man?"
"My Mother Kate, as the waves carouse,"
Quoth Tristan of Morbihan.

"As the waves that batter the old sea-wall
And master the storm for a span?"
"Even so, Mother Kate, the storm and all,"
Quoth Tristan of Morbihan.

"But did ye know, for the wine is red,
Before this night began,
Tristan, my son, your Yseult lay dead,—
My Tristan of Morbihan?"

"Ay, Mother, I knew; ay, Mother Kate;
One glint of your een to scan,
For that he drinketh and will sit late,
Your Tristan of Morbihan!"

Pitts Sanborn

The Milestone

THE ragged pilgrim, on the road to nowhere,
Waits at the granite milestone. It grows dark.
Willows lean by the water. Pleas of water
Cry through the trees. And on the boles and boughs
Green water-lights make rings, already paling.
Leaves speak everywhere. The willow leaves
Silverly stir on the breath of moving water,
Birch leaves, beyond them, twinkle, and then on the hill,
And the hill beyond again, and the highest hill,
Serrated pines, in the dusk, grow almost black.
By the eighth milestone on the road to nowhere
He drops his sack, and lights once more the pipe
There often lighted. In the dusk-sharpened sky
A pair of night-hawks windily sweep, or fall
Booming toward the trees. Thus had it been
Last year, and the year before, and many years:
Ever the same. "Thus turns our human track
Backward upon itself, I stand once more
By this small stream. . . ." Now the rich sound of leaves,
Turning in air to sway their heavy boughs,
Burns in his heart, sings in his veins, as spring
Flowers in veins of trees; bringing such peace
As comes to seamen when they dream of seas.
"O trees! exquisite dancers in grey twilight!
Witches! fairies! elves! who wait for the moon
To thrust her golden horn, like a golden snail,
Above that mountain—arch your green benediction
Once more over my heart. Muffle the sound of bells,
Mournfully human, that cries from the darkening valley;
Close with your leaves about the sound of water;
Take me among your hearts, as you take the mist
Among your boughs!" . . . Now by the granite milestone,
On the ancient human road that winds to nowhere,
The pilgrim listens, as the night air brings
The murmured echo, perpetual, from the gorge
Of barren rock far down the valley. Now,
Though twilight here, it may be starlight there;

Mist makes elfin lakes in the hollow fields;
The dark wood stands in the mist like a sombre island
With one red star above it. . . . "This I should see
Should I go on, follow the falling road—
This I have often seen. . . . But I shall stay
Here, where the ancient milestone, like a watchman,
Lifts up its figure eight, its one grey knowledge,
Into the twilight; as the watchman lifts
A lantern, which he does not know is out."

Conrad Aiken

His House

INTO the blue room do not go.
All the rooms of the house you may know:
Shimmer-curtained doors behind
Wind-lifted carpets; wandering find
Long corridors where portraits follow
Ever more portraits; vast vaults hollow
And hushed with vanished footfalls, where
Whisking phantoms rustle the air;
Low-ceilinged chambers, silk-lined rooms
Dim with thick silence unwound from tombs,
And glittering ball-floors. Only the blue
Room's azure dome is barred to you—
The terrible blue room, blue with fire
Lit at the farthest lamps of desire,
Where burning upward, a startled lark
Wheels and gleams like a flaming spark,
While blazing white cloud-fishes float
Out on the distance, too remote
For eye to know. A ball of gold
Ripples and leaps; in the evening cold
Steel-bright stars stab rapier light
Through deep grass, stumbling in sleepy night.
Only the blue room barred—must you
Find these other rooms too few?

Robert L. Wolf

Austerity

NO leaf could live in the late November storm;
And now the beaten trees, released by rain,
Come to their fine austerity again,
And exquisitely blossom into form.
For silence there has been long, lovely wait.
The voice of a tree itself can not be heard
Through shimmering stir and song of leaf and bird.
Now laxness and luxuriance abate.
Fullness of leaves can only hide the sheer
And utter truth of barest form and line.
Something is lost when trees with Spring grow big.
And what can be more ultimately near
To beauty than the sternly soft design,
The intricate perfection, of a twig?

Louise Townsend Nicholl

Discovery

I SHALL discover, after all and all,
From what alembic issues forth the Spring,
What cryptic finger moving by a wall,
Leaves tulip writs in tulip coloring.
I shall have knowledge of the tug and grip
Of tender roots where they are thrust and curled,
And what frail, opening doors at last let slip
The hidden spear into a lighted world.

So I shall know the mint of daffodils,
In darkened rooms where color comes to birth,
The mouldy chamber where the rose distils
A sweetness that is summer for the earth . . .
And all the strange, alchemic secret spell
I shall discover . . . but I shall not tell.

David Morton

The Abiding Moment

I

ONCE, between walls of sea-hewn rock,
Purpling with shadows and receded tides,
Shoreward I climbed, and found beneath the shock
And thunders of the spray
A well of opal peace with reefy sides
And water silent as a yesterday.

II

Flat on the shelving rim above I lay
And drank the loveliness, and when I passed
The hush and color of the pool were glassed
Within me changelessly;
The crystal lights, the shadows blue and jade,
Shells, starfish, sea-bloom—these had made
Within that flash of day their lasting home with me—
As though an image cast
Upon a mirror, though its source had gone,
Should baffle time, and too unreal to last,
Should still persist—a ghost, in flesh should still shine on.

III

And since, whenever beauty leaps to the lips of men,
Flaming the talk I hear, I am in that place again,
And whether I look from the ridges on redwoods purpling to shade,
Or watch the day cool-footed run over the desert pits,
Or blue sea spaces breaking with ships that steam to trade,
I see that prisoned water dreaming in stone,
And these things come to me in the beauty of it alone.

IV

Why should a shard of stone and sea
Abide, and other beauty die,
Gaunt cedars clenched against the stars,
Wings in a twilight sky?
Another might have gazed like me,

And gone unstirred until he saw
Depots with lanes of speed and law
And gathering and departing cars.
Why should that gleam of stone and sea
Abide, and other beauty fade for me?—
The tangled black of warm wet nights
With lithe winds slipping past,
Birches gone gold, cities of mounded lights,
Or the bare sea beneath a shortening mast.

V

To those who seek her beauty speaks, like love,
Suddenly from a will we know not of.
And there is no escaping from her power,
Her words that come in moon or sand,
    Dark forest or white flower.
We listen, kneel, and bear away the hour,
    And having heard,
Cannot forget the speaker or the word.
Words may be dead things, tossed from lip to lip
    As coins from hand to hand—
Like dust that winds can drive, that seeds can tame.
Yet dust that snares the light becomes itself a flame;
    It is such fire we bear
In a wide sea and one far-venturing ship,
    The lisp of wings in the gray air,
Cedars crag-clenched where the earth slides
Athwart harsh stars; or underneath the shock
    And boom of tide-flung spray
A well of opal peace with reefy sides
And water silent as a yesterday.

Frank Ernest Hill

Cortège for Rosenbloom

NOW, the wry Rosenbloom is dead
And his finical carriers tread,
On a hundred legs, the tread
Of the dead.
Rosenbloom is dead.

They carry the wizened one
Of the color of horn
To the sullen hill,
Treading a tread
In unison for the dead.

Rosenbloom is dead.
The tread of the carriers does not halt
On the hill, but turns
Up the sky.
They are bearing his body into the sky.

It is the infants of misanthropes
And the infants of nothingness
That tread
The wooden ascents
Of the ascending of the dead.

It is turbans they wear
And boots of fur
As they tread the boards
In a region of frost,
Viewing the frost.

To a chirr of gongs
And a chitter of cries
And the heavy thrum
Of the endless tread
That they tread.

To a jabber of doom
And a jumble of words
Of the intense poem
Of the strictest prose
Of Rosenbloom.

And they bury him there,
Body and soul,
In a place in the sky.
The lamentable tread!
Rosenbloom is dead.

Wallace Stevens

"So Still, So Sorrowful"

SO still, so sorrowful, these late November days!
When Earth herself surveys
As one who stands before her looking-glass and says
"Can this be I?
"Alas, is Summer dead?
"Has Autumn fled, nor stayed on my good-bye?"

Still, still, and sorrowful, these late November days,
When Earth herself surveys
As in a looking-glass.

Amy Murray

"Against the Mountain"

AGAINST the mountain,
In a hollow of the pasture,
See where the wind and the rain, in their fierce coupling,
Have wallowed beast-like in the frozen grass.

Amy Murray

Ice Age

NOISELESSLY the planets will blow by
Like smoke, like breath, like driven snow,
Frost-bitten suns on on, on on will blow,
Over earth's curve, the moons, like birds, will fly
Making no noise and only vague shadow.

And spider snow will spin and spin
A tangle of frost to snare earth in.

Little earth, then
Will house few men,
Little earth, shrunken,
No longer drunken
Purple, splendid, roistering earth;
Little earth hung
With pearls of seas,
Little earth shivering,
About to freeze.

And through her veins, caught in this web
Life and color and sound will ebb.

There will be faint tints, none
From the center of the sun.

There will be light noises, no
Sound harsher than snow.

Never a sound of thunder or river,
Torrent or stone,
Only vague breath from the old life-giver,
Making her own
Final, lingering filagree
Of frost blown
On the glass of the sky, in planet and tree
An icicle moon, a torrent and three
Glittering stars half-grown;

A slight tone
Rippling into the stilling river,
The crisp sea.

And spider snow will spin and spin
A tangle of cold to catch earth in.

Morning's red yawn,
Evening's pain,
Never will startle the earth, then,
Pure from her stain,
Earth's garments discarded and cleansed by the cold clean
hands of the rain.

A leaf's lines, and stem's tints,
Make in icy places, prints;

Trace of a foot, of a hooked claw
Settled to stone since the last thaw;

Minnows bent with wavering
Along a pool's ice edges cling.

All the beautiful, brave
Colors that curled in the wave
Flooding ground purple and crimsoning air
Are battered and rigid and bare.

Earth, bled of her sap,
Too stiff to unfold,
The sprouted mould
In the cleft of her lap;

While circles woven nearer now
Hang cold broodings on her brow.

Still, then crackling, once more still
Icy feet come up the hill.

Pushing back the granite fright
Men sing morning and sing night.

Only singing matters now
With stark birds on every bough.

Keeping back the loneliness
Men will swagger and caress,
And to dodge the fear of snow
Sing high and sing low.

Caroling for morning, caroling for noon,
Stiff tasks done with a tiny tune,
And never a note
In timbre any bigger than the tone of a flute,
Little sounds only coming in the throat,
And the big sounds mute.

Thinner, rarer and more shrill,
As silence whitens on the hill,
Whistling in daylight to keep up nerve,
While blue whiteness comes up the curve.

Bravado of sparse breath
Blown straight at death,
Voices in silences, swooping like birds,
Voices and caroling
Warm words. Flung at the sky's stiff stare
Into the brittle air
A laugh like a torch's flare. . . .

Desperate gaiety and games
And pleasantries for comfort like wan flames,
Will be their only way,
For in the midst of play—
Pause—a long sway,
Something faltering underneath,
The brief

Gasp of the breath, eye's blur,
Blunder of mortal fingers, words too thick to say,
Slight motions underneath the grey
Faces of cloud
And caroling, caroling, caroling loud,
To keep the cold away.

Some will slouch,
Lazy, brave,
Others crouch,
In a hidden cave,
Hearing near and hearing far,
Heavy steps from feet of stone,
Tread the warping fields alone,
Hearing far and hearing near
The wind's hiss in earth's ear,
Feel
Ground fall, and ground reel,
Brittle footsteps steal
Up the hill and down the cliff,
Touching, snapping, making stiff,
While granite footsteps, grinding numb
Up the little hollow come.

Not to give in
Men will go on
Trying to sin, making vague love, kissing wan
Faces. Trying to make
Children with women,
Trying to wake
Hints of old hunger, bitterly break
Flesh that turns marble-hard, trying to take
Life in their arms for their small comfort's sake.

Women will not move as move
Those confident of love.
Hurt like a torpid snake,
Agony drags and stirs but cannot wake.

So they will pass their days,
Fostering a child or two, giving names

Of half-remembered music, clamor, sound;
Over hunched shoulders peering round
For cold that creeping comes;
Over and over saying tropic words,
And calling babies after jungle birds.

They will be cheered with each new child,
And the wierd
Pall of the sky and the wild
Tangle of hooped moons piled
Like rubbish in the pallid west
Won't trouble them so much
With what they feared,
They'll touch
Cautiously their children and their lovers, clutch
Anything alive.

Not to give in
Men will go on,
Cold to the chin,
Light-stepping for fear
Feeling the thin
Ice of the air crack under the weight
Of feather-poised earth, and the near
Nuzzle of snow and the wind's spear.

Smoke from fire
And ice's smoke,
Lunge together,
Fight and choke,
Plunge and throttle and fight, and all
Blue smoke vanishes. Ashes fall.

Some will call the skimming planets, cranes
Going south for winter, nothing more,
And some will sow the icy fields with grains,
Search barren pools,
Harvest sea-weed, plant a pebble, or
Plough snow with patient tools.

And they will never cease to look for spring,
Climb endless hills,
And turn from east to west and west to east,
Imagining the least
Shreds of far color,
Supposing that they feel
Warmth on their faces, following the wheel,
Circling on its axis, search the sky
For sign of thaw, or rain or any change,
Looking for birds, where only dead stars fly
And calling snows and deepening snow-falls, strange.

In tightening silence, they will search for sound,
Beneath the smother of the sky,
Find tangled iron, as the first men found
Iron and more than mortal sinew in the ground.

And they will worship symbols of sure things,
Sure things, and tangible, cut clear,
Forgetting rust, they will keep iron near,
And try to pour into an iron mould,
The past's white fire perishing with cold.

And out of iron's touch upon their palms
Will come a song,
And they will seize stone hammers, make a clang,
Sing as they never sang,
Wild, assaulting, strong,
(*Clang, cold, clang*).
Stone on stone with iron bits
Clamped together (*Clang, clang*),
Iron twisted till it fits,
Notched and jammed and bolted fast,
Rearing heavily and slow
One monument against snow,
A monument to last, a tomb to hold
Yellow pollen of all past,
Against the cold.

Until at last comes twilight glimmer,
Voices, faces, motions dimmer,
Breath as low
As the all-covering snow,
Even the evening and the morning laid
Cheek to cheek, will fade,
Radiance and sound made one,
And quieted and blended into none.

Genevieve Taggard

"Isn't It Time?"

THEY are waves . . . these hills . . .
Through a following sea
We have found an island
Crested with planets . . .
Isn't it time to blow out the candle
In the lantern of the moon?
Isn't it time to go to sleep
On the warm brown rocks?

There is a wave-like chiming
Among lifted hills . . .
They recur in music
Above their valleys.
Isn't it time to listen
To their song in the night?
Heart against heart to lie
Listening?

I tell you beloved
It is the hills we hear
Breaking in surf of stars
Up the steep darkness . . .
I tell you it is the hills . . . the hills
Thundering . . . pouring bright thunder of sound
On the outer reef
Where the sea turns . . .

Grace Hazard Conkling

Sands

MY days are like sands; colorless,
Each matched to each, unerringly
They drift. The salt bleach of a sea
Has washed them clean and lustreless;
The teeth of rock on ragged strands
Have ground them to an even gray,
And one wind blows them a one way.

But O the slow making of sands.

All is here; forgotten things
Mix with the unforgettable,
Granite blends with tinted shell,
And nothing so stable that it clings
To its stability. Had there
Been more of marble, more of gold,
The sands would hide in their grim hold
Nothing more wise, nothing more fair.

But O the slow making of sands.

Grain on grain of even gray,
Slowly they drift in the one way,
Covering the wreck that stands
Against my beach of life. . . . one mast
Cuts at the sky, the hull is fast
In sand—the slow-made sands that pull
With the wind . . . covering . . .
And leaving every broken thing
Hushed and coldly beautiful.

Hazel Hall

Diana

I AM always carving arrows
  Or polishing my bow,
Yet why I care for hunting
  I do not seem to know.

For they are long and lonely,
  The ways of wood and hill,
And it is wearisome to seek,
  And sorrowful to kill.

But I am always hoping
  I shall carry home some prize,
Like a white-feathered squirrel,
  Or a fawn with blue eyes!

Winifred Welles

Little Ego

YOU mustn't smile when I stroke your hair,
not yours to be proud of, this hair isn't yours:
If your mother hadn't liked your father,
your two grandmothers your two grandfathers,
your four great-grandmothers your four great-grandfathers,
your eight great-great-grandmothers your eight great-great-grandfathers:
well:
When you grow up,
and you like a boy,
and you two grow down,
you two have a child:
and that child a child,
that child a child,
child a child,
child a
great-great-great-great-great-great-grandchild:
Well, what are you smiling at now?

Alfred Kreymborg

Night Takes the Winter Forest

LAST waves flung from the ebbing flood
Of glaring daylight break afar,
Through the illusion of the wood
The night comes, star by star.

The silence spreads through mist aflare
To hold each fallen leaf,
Sounds of a crow scrape on the air
Complainingly and brief.

Without a stir, without a sound,
The trees stare skyward from the hill
Like men who seek and have not found
And fear they never will. . . .

George O'Neil

South Wind

TONIGHT the wind is lyrical again
With faint disturbing odors of the loam
Blown from the southland where a touch of rain
Has changed an orchard to a stretch of foam.

The barren boughs beyond my window mark
A rhythmic ecstasy as though they knew
The meaning of this softness in the dark
And how the rain struck . . . and the magic grew. . . .

The stars cloud and a secret is not clear;
What is this clarion for every bud?
Breathless, I listen, but I cannot hear
Even the wind above my singing blood.

George O'Neil

The Aim Was Song

BEFORE man came to blow it right
The wind once blew itself untaught
And did its loudest day and night
In any rough place where it caught.

Man came to tell it what was wrong.
It hadn't found the place to blow;
It blew too hard: the aim was song;
And listen—how it ought to go.

He took a little in his mouth,
And held it long enough for north
To be converted into south,
And then by measure blew it forth.

By measure. It was word and note,
The wind the wind had meant to be.
A little through the lips and throat.
The aim was song, the wind could see.

Robert Frost

The Measure ~ *A Journal of Poetry*

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ACTING EDITOR FOR MARCH, APRIL, AND MAY—MAXWELL ANDERSON
ASSISTANT FOR THE SAME TERM—LOUISE TOWNSEND NICHOLL

Thunder in the Index

SINCE I am to edit THE MEASURE only three months, and since in all likelihood I am to be succeeded by another editor (not yet chosen), who will disagree with all my theories, and will publish his disagreement, I am under no compulsion to establish a policy that can be consistently followed. This is a rare and fortunate situation. Nothing is more deadly than a set philosophy when it becomes involved with the dignity and traditions of a publication. We hope to exhibit a peaceful revolution in principles every quarter.

Personality is a different matter. Mortals have their indefensible, inescapable prejudices and illusions. To rid ourselves of them artificially and write with hypocritical impartiality is even more deplorable than the pretense to false enthusiasms. *I am not an impartial editor. I shall not try to be, and I hope the editors of* THE MEASURE *who come after me will take the same position.* As a critic of verse my predilections are toward the musical and rounded forms, and away from the half-said, half-conceived infantilities and whimsicalities of the dominant American school. I have, however, enjoyed Amy Lowell on rare occasions, though no title or phrase of hers remains in my memory. Carl Sandburg has given me glimpses not to be forgotten in such work as *Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind* and *Cool Tombs.* When he rhapsodizes over smoke and steel he seems to me to be wasting his time.

In this opening MEASURE there may be one or two pieces in the imagist or suggestive or telegraphic manner. I liked them more or less or they wouldn't be included. But they are efforts toward another ideal than mine, a striving away from the ear and the emotions toward the eye and the

intellect. In a large way they fit with the tradition of Chaucer and Burns as opposed to the tradition of Shakespeare and Keats. They differ mainly from these predecessors in that they are inclined to follow the prevalent journalistic mode, telling their tales or revealing their fancies in headlines and shorthand. The difference is not only one of form. In the current mode exaltation has gone out and cleverness has come in. Is it because there's nothing to exalt us at present, and we've fallen back on charades in desperation for amusement? Personally I think it is, often, just that.

This is not, at any rate, an age favorable to great poetry. It remains an age favorable to poetry; but, if the evidence of the last ten years be averaged, to minor poetry, to lightly motived lyrics and superficial sketches, rather than to the impassioned utterance that endures. There are not, let us confess, any great poets writing at this time in English, or none so far uncovered. In the nature of things there can't be. Nobody is sure enough of what he has to say to say it with conviction. Conrad Aiken, with a nearly perfect technique, builds up word symphonies. The inference is that he can't find a theme in our Sahara of unbelief and commercial sharp-practice. Contemporary prophecy, what there is of it, is spoken in asides, in hints and falterings. In no previous age have fundamentals been questioned as they are questioned now. The very value of art, of life, grows dubious.

THE MEASURE, then, is a hope against hope, a venture in the face of despair, a fiddling while Rome burns. We can't stop the conflagration, and we are tired of contemplating it. We are no more certain of the value of fiddling than you are, but we know no other activity so satisfactory. It may be discovered that poetry and art are out of place in the new tradesman's civilization about to be erected on the ashes. If so we are atavistic. We were born too late, and can't help it. But there are enough poetry lovers left alive to keep us going a while with sympathy and manuscripts. And—in spite of fate and determinism—poetry may come into its own again in a more solidly anchored age.

But why a magazine of verse at this inauspicious time? We can't rest satisfied because there has been good verse in the past and will be more in the future. If this is a day of minor verse we shall e'en write minor verse, for verse we must write. Hunger of the spirit is not appeased by the satisfaction of our elders—or youngers—and betters. The lean years must be lived through somehow or there would be nobody to function later on, and no tradition, no thread of creative thought. Certain generations have to content themselves with slow, painful, groping work in darkness.

For that matter we have maintained all literature at great expense for a number of centuries in order to produce five or six invaluable books, ten or twelve invaluable poems. Obviously not all poets can expect to write

great poetry, few can reasonably expect to live at times when the production of great poetry is by some complex synthesis of social and personal aspiration possible. It would be ridiculous to hope to publish great verse in every number of a monthly periodical. If THE MEASURE gets hold of an undoubted masterpiece once in its career, it will be lucky. *Poetry,* of Chicago, has come out uninterruptedly for ten years without doing it. This is not the fault of the editors of *Poetry*. If there had been masterpieces to print they would have printed them. There have been none. But the ten years of *Poetry's* history have been useful, fruitful, interesting. Miss Monroe and her band have pioneered well, and if the near future should actually hold a poetic revival in merit as well as in bulk it will be due largely to their efforts. We expect to be of aid in the same direction. We put our shoulders tentatively against the mountain, hoping it will slide into the sea at a touch. Nobody can be sure there isn't a revival imminent. I can only say, for myself, that I doubt it. The age is too material-minded and too faithless for an artistic renascence.

As acting editor of THE MEASURE I am responsible for all acceptances except in the case of the work of poets on the editorial board. Poetry by the editors is voted on in conference, after which the acting editor has a veto power. We intend to publish our own poems when we think them good enough.

Our expenses are paid, so far, out of our own pockets and the pockets of friends as impecunious as ourselves. We shall pay for verse—as much as we can afford. Our rate will not be high, probably, at first.

MAXWELL ANDERSON.

"Edna St. Vincent Millay"

ONE may as well admit that Edna St. Vincent Millay is just now the most interesting person in American poetry. Unfortunately a great many have begun reading her verse not because they were seeking good art, but because F. P. A. made nursery rhymes about her name, or because of her frank professions of impropriety. They have been confused as to what she is and means. Probably Frank Shay's first Salvo, containing fifteen poems by Miss Millay, has not cleared their minds.[1]

Nevertheless, this pamphlet-booklet defines Miss Millay pretty well. For one thing, it reveals clearly her artistic attitude. It is a collection of lyrics, but one leaves it realizing as never before the dominance of the dramatic in almost everything that Miss Millay has done.

It is unnecessary to seek for this in pieces that are frankly objective, in

[1] Salvo One: A Few Figs From Thistles, Poems and Four Sonnets, by Edna St. Vincent Millay. New York. Frank Shay.

She Is Overheard Singing, Daphne, The Beanstalk, and *Aria da Capo.* In these, of course, aside from the personal experience and personal philosophy which legitimately underlie any art, the ego does not intrude. But the quality of these is after all little different from the quality of Miss Millay talking about herself. Even when she becomes confessional it is to build up pictures. One is told of her emotions, but only, as with dramatis personae, through her actions. These lyrics are, in fact, dramatic monologues in which the author is spying upon herself.

> Grief of grief has drained me clean,
> Still it seems a pity
> No one saw,—it must have been
> Very pretty,

she wrote in her first volume. There is the point of view. The best poem in *A Few Figs From Thistles* is probably a sonnet beginning

> I think I should have loved you presently
> And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
> And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
> And caught your hand against my cheek and breast,

and these four lines show as well as anything one could quote how the point of view is utilized. Miss Millay is a poet who externalizes her own soul, saying not "I shall feel thus," but "I shall do that."

She carries this dramatization pretty far. Probably her minute dramatic sense has made meter a minor concern with her. It is hard to explain the acceptance of conventional forms by so individual a poet on any other ground. And certainly it affects her diction, making it vehicular only. There is no fine phrasing in anything of Miss Millay's except in a few girlish poems. She never uses a revealing adjective; she prefers the revealing gesture. On this account she is never colorful, and she will seem sterile to some readers when she does not seem shocking to them. From the standpoint of color even *Renascence,* as someone remarked in conversation, is just rain. The later sonnets and lyrics have in their objective accuracy the white and gray of marble or running water. To one who likes purple in his poetry this is unsatisfying, but with re-reading he will get a peculiar satisfaction in the very thing which has made her forsake color for action, painting for sculpture. It dignifies the rather conventional music of her work. To the theme of disillusion and the tone of irony which are now Edna St. Vincent Millay's it brings a fullness of active content which calls one back to re-read, to ponder, to repeat.

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